

AFRICAN WOMEN EXPERIENCING PERIMENOPAUSE: HEADACHES

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This paper focuses on women in the poorer nations, such as in Africa, who experience perimenopause and are coping with symptoms associated with perimenopause. Headaches are symptoms associated with perimenopause, a condition that involves changes in the hormones impacting women between the ages of 20-45 (“American Society for Reproductive Medicine,” 2008; “Perimenopause Symptoms,” n.d.). The association of headaches experienced by African women with hormones, stress, and nutrients will be further discussed, and natural approaches aimed to help women who experience these symptoms will be presented (Digre, Baggaley, Brennan, & Jeffries, 2011).

Conditions and Causes of Headaches

Headaches are common in every individual at one time or another (Digre et al., 2011). Headaches can occur in the head and neck by certain nerves from the pain in your head (Digre et al., 2011). Migraines are the most common headache disorder, with tension headaches following (Beithon et al., 2013).

Forty percent of women in South Africa experience tension headaches and about 25-30% experience migraines (inherited neurological disorders) or vascular headaches (Kaye, 2010). Vascular headaches whereby the arteries do not narrow derive from unhealthy lifestyles, and migraines whereby arteries narrow leading to the brain then widen disturbing the blood flow derive from the changes in the brain or triggers such as hormonal imbalance (Kaye, 2010).

In East Africa, women have headaches more so before or during their menstrual cycle (“Uganda,” 2012). Sex hormones are produced around the time the migraine headaches are triggered. Headaches that come mostly around the time of a woman’s menstrual cycle are caused by changes in oestrogen (Kaye, 2012).

Sometimes when women are stressed, women experience tension headaches for days (Kaye, 2010). Migraines may develop from sensitivity to light, sound, and stress causing dizziness, nausea, vomiting, and so forth (Fear, 2005; Kewman & Roberts, 1980). Headaches and migraines can be stimulated by summer heat combined with pollen along with season change (Peter, 2008). Studies have shown dehydration, bright light, stress, odors, fragrances, and some things as small as ice cream may cause headaches in the South Africa heat during summer months (Peter, 2008).

Experiences of Women in Developing Countries

Chronic pain can have a physical and emotional impact on the overall life of individuals (Donaldson, 2011). A female living in Brazil shared, “Aspirina and paracetamol are popular for headaches” (A. Barguil, social media communication, January 20, 2014). One male from Chennai, Tamil Nadu (India) shared, for headaches, women “simply use Eucalyptus oil and take hot steam bath (for face) covering their face and the hot water pot added with Eucalyptus oil drops to inhale with a bed sheet. (S. Balasekar, social media communication, January 20, 2014).

Another male from Tunis, Africa wrote (J. Bahri, email communication, January 20, 2014) although not an expert, he believes older women do not take any medications or natural remedies for headaches. One U.S. African female Doctoral graduate from Nigeria shared (N. Kelley, email communication, January 20, 2014) spiritual healing is sought for most conditions. Most women in East Africa, however, work through the pain without treatment (“Uganda,” 2012). Researcher found that not seeking treatment make the pain worse and less likely to be cured (“Uganda,” 2012).

Suggestions to Approach Headaches

The following suggestions aim to help women, to include women in Africa or other nations, who experience headaches associated with perimenopause and are not aimed to diagnose, prescribe, treat, or cure. Natural techniques discussed in this paper aim to enlighten women on lifestyles and healthy living. Women who believe their condition results from a medical disease are recommended to seek assistance from an MD and naturopathic doctor (ND).

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) approaches, such as biobehavioral training (biofeedback, relaxation training), has been found to be an effective treatment for migraine (Sun-Edelstein & Mauskop, 2011). Biofeedback involves obtaining feedback from computerized sensors placed on the body to monitor the body's physiological processes (Kewman & Roberts, 1980). Researchers, however, realized that the control of finger temperature of women, who experienced migraine headaches and received no prior biofeedback training, may not be the primary variable associated with therapeutic changes, although using this method has resulted in the improvement of migraine symptoms (Kewman & Roberts, 1980).

Nutraceutical options, another CAM approach, have been deployed in the management of headache disorders (Sun-Edelstein & Mauskop, 2011). Nutraceutical option involves selecting herbals (butterbur, feverfew), minerals (magnesium), or vitamins (Coenzyme Q10) to approach headaches (Digre et al., 2011; Sun-Edelstein & Mauskop, 2011). If butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*) is found to be effective for headaches associated with perimenopause, organic gurus may obtain the perennial shrub found in wet banks or streams of Europe, Asia, and North America, and consider growing along the banks of Africa (National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, 2009).

To approach vascular headaches, magnesium, which is nearly present in all physiological system, may be effective (Fawcett, Haxby, & Male, 1999). Magnesium deficiency is low in most Africa counties; as in West Africa and other areas, magnesium is stored in sorghum, maize, and wheat (Joy, 2013, Abstract section; Worldwatch Institute, 2011). Coenzyme Q10 stored in groundnuts (peanuts) are grown in West Africa and stored in African catfish are farmed in Nigeria (Digre et al., 2011; Ntare, Diallo, Ndjeunga, & Waliyar, 2008; Okoli & Anekwe, 2013). Individuals taking medications, however, should consider consulting a doctor prior to taking supplements, as supplements, or a combination of supplements, may cause harmful side effects when taken with medications (Nihira, 2012).

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